

News from the

National Association of Railroad Passengers

December 1995

11
Vol. 29

ISTEA / Passenger Rail "Flexibility" Killed

FUNDING BILL NOW LAW

President Clinton signed PL 104-50 (HR 2002), the 1996 transportation appropriations bill, on November 15. Here are the final amounts:

(\$ millions)

Program	1995	1996	Change
Federal Highway Admin.	19,878.6	19,969.7	+ 0.5 %
Federal Aviation Admin.	8,392.2	8,216.3	- 2.1 %
Federal Transit Admin.	4,613.5	4,051.4	- 12.2 %
Amtrak (see below)	993.5	750.0	- 24.5 %

For Amtrak subcategories, see Oct. News (table, p. 1, column headed "Likely").

States Still Lack Right to Spend Federal Funds on Passenger Rail

Highway Interests Win; Traveling Public Loses

House-Senate conferees on the National Highway System (NHS) Designation Act killed the Senate-passed Roth-Biden provision letting states spend some of their federal Highway Trust Fund (HTF) dollars on intercity passenger rail projects. Rep. Bud Shuster's (R-PA) strong opposition counted for more than the Senate's favorable 64-36 vote on June 21 (July News) and the written views of several governors.

On October 20, Governors George Allen (R-VA), Tom Ridge (R-PA), Gaston Caperton (D-WV) and Christine Todd Whitman (R-NJ) wrote to Shuster in support of Roth-Biden. Four

(continued on page 4)

Still Working on Amtrak Half-Cent

The concept of using an existing half-cent of the federal gasoline tax to create an Intercity Passenger Rail Trust Fund is still alive on Capitol Hill.

This concept, approved by the Senate Commerce Committee in its Amtrak reauthorization (S.1318), advanced November 2 when the Senate Finance Committee approved it. Since the half-cent is a tax measure, the committee approved it as a separate bill (S.1395). Chairman William V. Roth Jr. (R-DE) may attach it to the big "post-veto" reconciliation bill.

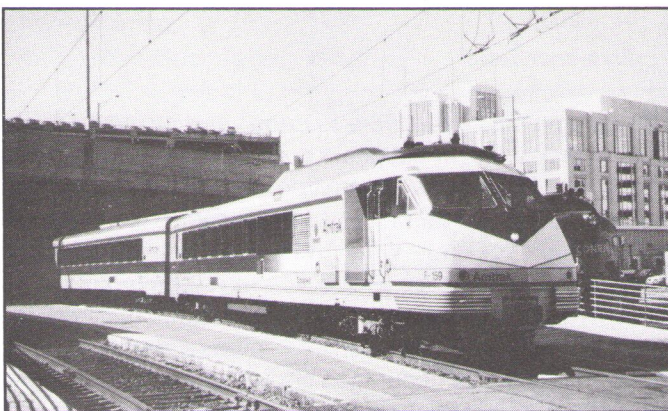
Support from the House Ways and Means Committee will be necessary—that committee is likely to take seriously the views of Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman Bud Shuster (R-PA), who has hinted he might consider funding Amtrak from the mass transit account.

(continued on page 2)

"The House just adamantly refused to give the States flexibility [for intercity passenger rail]. So much for the revolution. So much for the devolution of power away from Washington to the States. Here we have an example on the limits of revolutionary fervor; it ends when the committee is threatened with a tiny, marginal loss of authority or it ends where important interests to the highway community decide where they want it to end."

—Sen. Joe Biden (D-DE), floor remarks on the cutting of Roth-Biden ISTEA flexibility language by National Highway System conferees [Congressional Record, November 17, p. S17223].

TURBO TRAIN ON TOUR



—Scott Leonard

Through much of 1995, a refurbished turbo train (shown here October 17 at Washington) has run as part of Amtrak's Empire Corridor fleet. Called RTL-2 (Rohr Turbo Liner), it was upgraded for 125-mph operations to demonstrate the potential efficiencies of advanced turbine technology. Using ISTEA Section 1036(c) funds, the project was funded by the Federal Railroad Administration, New York DOT and Amtrak. It first reached 125-mph on February 28 in tests on a Conrail line near Albany, and has repeated that on the Northeast Corridor.

The train got two TM-1600 Makila turbines (built by Turbomeca of Grand Prairie, TX), upgraded engine control, refurbished trucks, a new interior and new exterior color scheme. It is being evaluated for use in the Empire Corridor and other non-electrified corridors.

The RTL-2 visited the 3-C (Cleveland-Columbus-Cincinnati) Corridor in early October; then the Keystone (Philadelphia-Harrisburg) Corridor in mid-October; Atlanta-Birmingham-Meridian-New Orleans-Mobile in late October; and Chicago-Detroit-Pontiac in early November. Some communities in the South hope it can return there next summer to help provide special service to the Olympic Games in Atlanta.

Acting CEO Faces Amtrak's Biggest Challenge

Robert VanderClute, the veteran Amtrak official who became Interim CEO of Amtrak's Chicago-based "Intercity" business unit on October 16, addressed the NARP board of directors on October 27. He said a recent management Amtrak retreat had focussed on the idea of "one team, one Amtrak," something he thought "we've lost sight of the past few years."

He called fiscal 1995's 2% drop in system ridership a "positive sign," considering Amtrak's service cuts. "More than a dozen product lines posted ridership increases," he said. "We're going to grow" the business at Intercity, he said—in contrast with the previous philosophy focussed on cutbacks.

VanderClute noted that United Airlines cut its portion of the air-rail fare [by 22%, on October 1] and gateway city ads are planned. Promotional efforts are planned for the student and seniors markets, including ads in *Modern Maturity*.

One of VanderClute's first crises was Michigan's plan to run the partly-state-supported Chicago-Toronto *International* without food service—which Amtrak thought impractical on the 12-hour run. Because the state had no additional funds, Amtrak "put up revenues on risk." To help get those revenues, Amtrak is contacting all employees involved with the train for suggestions, and will sell Michigan products on board.

Half-Cent Hopes Alive

(from page 1)

This half-cent went to deficit reduction until October 1, then shifted to the mass transit account of the Highway Trust Fund. This account has a huge balance—estimated at over \$10 billion at the end of fiscal 1996.

Transit interests are well represented on the Finance Committee, which includes both New York senators, plus Bill Bradley (D-NJ) and Carol Moseley-Braun (D-IL). To meet transit industry concerns, the Committee added a provision insuring that Amtrak (not transit) funding would be cut if mass transit account balances fall below a certain level. Ignoring this effort to help transit, the American Public Transit Association (APTA) mounted an all-out effort to kill the Amtrak provision.

The federal transit program is funded both from general funds and the Highway Trust Fund. APTA says the trust fund part of its authorization has been funded fully in recent years, and APTA expects this to continue. This is unrealistic, since transit's trust-fund authorization—flat in recent years—jumps a whopping \$2 billion—73%—from 1996 to 1997.

Total federal transit spending must remain within the gradually declining ceiling imposed on overall federal transportation spending. That ceiling counts dollars equally, whether they come from trust funds or the general fund.

Thus, even if transit got no general funds in 1997, "full trust-funding" of transit would mean federal transit funding would have to rise \$749 million (roughly Amtrak's total 1996 appropriation). Under budget rules, that could happen only if other modes' spending dropped dramatically. That is not in the cards, even if Congress changes hands next year.

Other reasons the plan would help and not hurt transit:

- Due to the off-budget nature of part of the half-cent (see table), it would increase total spending on passenger rail.
- Much Amtrak investment benefits transit—by improving facilities jointly used with transit, by enabling Amtrak to feed

VanderClute did not reverse the controversial, four-days-a-week *Crescent* downgrading, saying the plan includes "\$1.5 million in [net] savings that I'm satisfied are real."

He said Amtrak's first four Viewliners—the first, new single-level sleeping cars built for U.S. operation since Amtrak's birth—would run on the *Lake Shore Limited* [this began November 8] to show how the cars do in severe winter weather, before Amtrak accepts more of them, probably in March. [The *Crescent* will get the next cars and become the first train with only Viewliners for sleepers.]

He wants to save the *Pioneer*. To promote business, management will be meeting with each employee and ticket agent along the route and with the states. Travel agents are being asked to promote the train. Its perennially limited capacity has been expanded—transition-car coach seats are now sold and a second sleeper was added November 15 along with a second diner to run as a lounge (since Amtrak is short of "real" lounges). To improve the train's bottom line, coach and sleeper fares were increased 5% and 10% respectively.

Since the *Pioneer* mail car runs empty eastbound, efforts are underway to fill it with express (package) business.

VanderClute said Amtrak has visited Oklahoma to talk about restoration of service there.

When asked why Amtrak couldn't turn trains as quickly as the Japanese turn their bullet trains (reportedly 20 minutes), he noted the big staff (90) needed to do that.

VanderClute is a serious candidate to head Intercity on a "permanent" basis. The credibility he appears to have among Amtrak employees at all levels suggests he would be a good choice. NARP has urged Amtrak President Thomas Downs to make this choice. ■

[Amtrak West CEO Gilbert Mallery and James Slakey, head of Washington DOT's Division of Rail and Transit, also addressed the NARP board—coverage of them soon.]

INTERCITY PASSENGER RAIL TRUST FUND

(\$ millions)

Fiscal Year	What Amtrak Would Get Automatically	Projected Full Value of Half-Cent
1996	131	720
1997	663	736
1998	667	751
1999	670	766
2000	672	781
Five-Year Total	2,541	3,754

more connecting passengers to transit and by improving the financial well-being of suppliers common to both industries.

• Under the Finance Committee plan, the entire half-cent would go to a new Intercity Passenger Rail Trust Fund. But the "off-budget" ceiling—what Amtrak could spend without an appropriation—would be \$1.2 billion less (see table).

• The appropriations committees don't operate in a vacuum, so the half-cent won't be "all new money." To the extent the half-cent encourages appropriators to reduce general-funding for Amtrak, transit's ability to continue to get some general funds is enhanced. ■

Florida Tries Again

After attempts at a high-speed rail project, Florida in 1991 turned high-speed development over to its DOT. After market and technology studies, the DOT in 1994 committed \$70 million a year in transportation trust fund money to high-speed development (pending annual legislative approval). The DOT then requested proposals, due October 31.

Five parties submitted applications:

- **Florida Overland eXpress** includes Fluor Daniel, Bombardier, GEC Alstom, French National Railways and the University of Florida. It would use trains like the French TGV on a new right-of-way: Tampa-Lakeland-Disney area-Orlando Airport-West Palm Beach-West Broward-Miami Airport. (Miami-Orlando would begin in 2004, Orlando-Tampa in 2006, with more service in 2017.) Total cost would be \$4.8 billion.

- **ITALFERR-SIS TAV**, the consulting engineering subsidiary of the Italian State Railways, had a three-option proposal, with three different levels of service and cost:

- 1) Electrify existing lines. Miami-Orlando infrastructure costs would be up to \$1.3 billion; travel time 2:30 at 120 mph.

- 2) 155-mph Pendolino (tilt) trains on existing lines. Miami-Orlando costs would be up to \$2.1 billion; travel time 2:10.

- 3) 186-mph service (like Italian ETR-500) on new lines. Miami-Orlando infrastructure costs would be up to \$7.5 billion; travel time 1:45.

- **Rail Florida** includes Raytheon, ABB Traction and Amtrak, planning a four-phase, sequential program:

- 1) In 1997, run 79-mph Tampa-Lakeland-Orlando-Sanford with Flexliners (diesel multiple unit trains) like those used in Denmark. Capital cost: \$10.4 million.

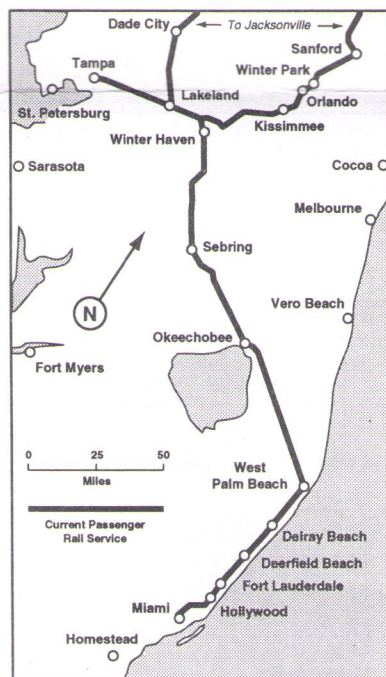
- 2) Track, crossing, signal improvements made. In 2001, 79-mph, non-electric, tilting, X2000's run. In 2004, X2000's run to Miami at 90-125 mph. Capital cost: \$737.9 million.

- 3) More improvements and use of the I-4 right-of-way Tampa-Orlando in 2009-2016. Capital cost: \$1.8 billion.

- 4) In 2021, with electric, 150-mph X2000's, Miami-Tampa/Orlando trip times fall below two hours. Capital cost: \$1.7 billion (total for all four phases, \$4.3 billion).

- **Florida Maglev Consortium** plans a 300-mph maglev system at \$3.8 billion. It would open first Orlando-Disney World, Fort Lauderdale-Miami, St. Petersburg-Tampa.

- **Florida Magplane, Inc.** includes a unit of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. It calls for a "magplane" averaging 224 mph on an elevated, aluminum trough. Magplane calls for continuous 24-hour service to 35 stations with no wait longer than 15 minutes, and non-stop service between all stations. St. Petersburg-



—Scott Leonard

Orlando would open first. The system of 325 miles of double guideway, plus 35 stations with separate access, would cost \$4.4 billion.

Proposals involving existing lines face the challenge of getting cooperation from freight-line owner CSX.

Florida DOT is evaluating the proposals, and held public meetings in November. It will award a franchise (if one of the five proposals above is acceptable) by February 28. ■

Rail Transit is Needed

The five points below are often used as reasons to ignore rail transit investment. The responses are by Tom Matoff, ex-general manager of the Sacramento Regional Transit District and (until this fall) executive director of the Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority. He ran the Seattle area agency during 1995's failed ballot initiative to fund rail transit there. Matoff's remarks were published in the Tacoma News Tribune (September 11), in the Seattle Post Intelligencer, and in Moving People (October-November 1995, Modern Transit Society, Sacramento):

- **"Rail is a 19th-century technology."**—That is a meaningless argument. Cars are a 19th-century technology. Highways are a 2nd-century technology. Universities are a 14th-century technology. Would anyone advocate that we don't need our universities or our highways because they are old concepts?

- **"Telecommuting."**—The idea that telecommuting will replace the need for effective transportation is preposterous. If telecommunication were a solution to congestion, the explosion in electronic communication over the past 20 years would have decongested I-5 by now. Airlines view an increasing volume of intercity telephone calls as an indicator of increased community interest in travel between cities. Increased telecommunications are an indicator of increasing, not decreasing, demand for transportation.

- **"The region's dispersed travel patterns make rail unnecessary."**—Dispersed travel patterns (a nice way to say "sprawl") are a characteristic of almost every metropolitan area in North America. That is true of cities such as Portland [Ore.], San Jose, Sacramento and St. Louis, all of which have highly successful light-rail systems. Rail isn't the appropriate mode for all parts of this region, but we have strong corridors where rail transit is the best means for moving people.

- **"Promoting rail or transit is a form of 'social engineering.'"**—That is a particularly insidious charge because it contains a kernel of truth. Most, if not all, public policy decisions involve social engineering. Decisions on where to locate schools or sewer lines are forms of social engineering. Building the interstate highway system was a major social-engineering decision, as is a decision to keep this region auto-dependent. We need some social-engineering decisions that offer people some transportation choices.

- **"Transit carries only 4% of the region's trips, so we don't need more transit."**—To the contrary, that figure should set off alarms that the existing transportation system is out of balance and that we need more transit options. In part, that figure is misleading in that it refers not to the number of people using transit, but the percentage of trips taken by transit. Very few people will use transit for all their travel. Besides, I-5 carries only 5% of the trips in the region. Does that mean we don't need it? ■

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Crescent: Amtrak Intercity added a fourth Atlanta-New Orleans frequency (New York-Atlanta being daily already) November 18, allowing more weekend travel to/from New Orleans. Now, Atlanta departures are Sunday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday; New Orleans departures are Sunday, Monday, Thursday, Saturday. The new trip (Saturday from Atlanta, Sunday from New Orleans) does not have the upgraded first-class and dining service the other three trips got October 29, but rather the downgraded amenities on the trains that run New York-Atlanta only.

Michigan: Amtrak Intercity kept the Chicago-Toronto *International* daily for now. Food service was retained, and the train was re-equipped with former Santa Fe Hi-Level cars.

Coast Starlight: Will run only five days a week, January 9-March 13. Southbound, won't depart Seattle Tuesday-Wednesday; northbound won't depart Los Angeles Sunday-Monday; breaking one connection a week from the *Sunset Limited* at Los Angeles and to/from the *Empire Builder* at Portland. It retains all three weekly connections to the *Sunset Limited*.

Florida: Amtrak put off indefinitely plans—strongly protested by NARP—to end service at Hollywood.

MUSICAL CHAIRS ON THE HILL

House: Norman Mineta (CA), ranking Democrat on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee (and ex-Public Works chair), resigned October 10. James Oberstar (MN) became the Committee's ranking Democrat. Robert E. Wise, Jr. (WV) became the Railroads Subcommittee ranking Democrat, replacing William O. Lipinski (IL), who replaced Oberstar on Aviation.

Senate: William V. Roth, Jr. (R-DE) now chairs the Finance Committee. Phil Gramm (R-TX) joined Finance and was replaced on Appropriations by Ben Nighthorse-Campbell (R-CO).

FROM THE *TIMES'* POST-MORTEM ON NHS

"[John] Warner [R-VA, chair of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee's Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Infrastructure, and NHS conferee] said he had stood up to Mr. Shuster, and 'neither of us blinked.'

"That is correct. The Senate capitulated—without batting an eye."

—New York Times editorial on NHS conference, November 21.

ISTEA Inflexibility

(from page 1)

others wrote Senate leaders in June (Sept. *News*). State DOT's—whose officials are not elected!—were less supportive, due to a pro-road bias and the desire to avoid becoming the target of rail advocates urging use of "Amtrak flexibility."

Even House Conferee Robert A. Borski opposed Roth-Biden. The Philadelphia Democrat heard objections from local transit agency SEPTA, which saw Amtrak as potential competitor for HTF money when a state funding commitment apparently was abandoned and federal funding was reduced.

Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY) *did* get \$26 million in HTF dollars for the Penn Station-Farley project in Manhattan (Aug. '92 *News*), so \$77.6 million of the federal \$100 million share now is secure. The city has pledged \$25 million, the state \$75 million. (Of the new \$26 million, \$15 million was left from the Hell Gate Bridge project, which ran under budget.)

This shows that a legislator who strongly supports a rail project can get highway funds for it even when in the minority party. Remember this when Congress writes its next road authorization, scheduled to be enacted by October 1, 1997.

Because the NHS bill also ends federal speed limits on highways, safety groups urged Clinton to veto the bill. ■

WHO RIDES LONG-DISTANCE TRAINS?

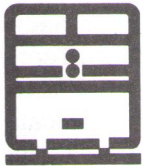
For mini-profiles of passengers NARP interviewed last March on the *Broadway Limited*, *Southwest Chief* and *Capitol Limited*, send NARP a self-addressed, stamped envelope. The profiles help show that such trains are not "land cruises for the wealthy."

John R. Martin, *President*; Eugene K. Skoropowski, *Vice President*; Robert W. Glover, *Secretary*; Joseph F. Horning, Jr., *Treasurer*; Ross B. Capon, *Exec. Dir.*; Scott Leonard, *Asst. Dir.*; Jane L. Colgrove, *Membership Dir.*; Harriet Parcels, *Transp. Associate*.

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